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## *Editorial*

# Justice for the victims of political killings

**A**s expected, the result of the Melo Commission's investigation of political killings in the country is devoid of any credibility and value.

Since the start, it was obvious that the Melo Commission never intended to conduct a proper investigation and would only parrot the old lies peddled by Malacañang, the PNP and AFP. Its sole objective was to absolve Gloria Arroyo and her murdering officials. It had no credibility among the victims' relatives and local and international human rights organizations.

In a desperate bid for credibility, the Melo Commission made much of its conclusion that a few AFP personnel and politicians were involved in the killings. At the same time, however, former Supreme Court justice Jose Melo who headed the commission stressed that the entire AFP establishment was not involved and that while it may have implicated Ret. Maj. Gen. Jovito Palparan, it said his involvement was indirect and that he was not criminally liable.

Melo openly admitted that the conclusions of his commission were based on military and police reports. Thus, they were no different from those of the PNP's Task Force Usig. Given their utter lack of trust in the commission, witnesses, relatives and friends of the victims did not bother to attend any of its hearings.

Arroyo has withheld the commission's



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worthless report from the public, fearful that it would only incite widespread condemnation. Instead, she has made the motions of ordering the Melo Commission to continue its investigations to cover up for its inutility in clearing her name and that of her armed forces.

She has likewise hypocritically ordered the Department of National Defense, Department of Justice and the Commission on Human Rights to investigate the murders and even suggested creating a new branch of court to try cases of political killings. She has smugly asked the victims' relatives, witnesses and militant organizations to help and testify in the ongoing investigation. She has invited the European Union and many other European countries who have condemned the killings and demanded an honest investigation to send over representatives to help in the probe. This way, she hopes to make acceptable her sham investigation of the killings.

These moves are totally deceptive. For at the same time, Arroyo declared that 99.9% of AFP soldiers are "good."

She accused Karapatan and

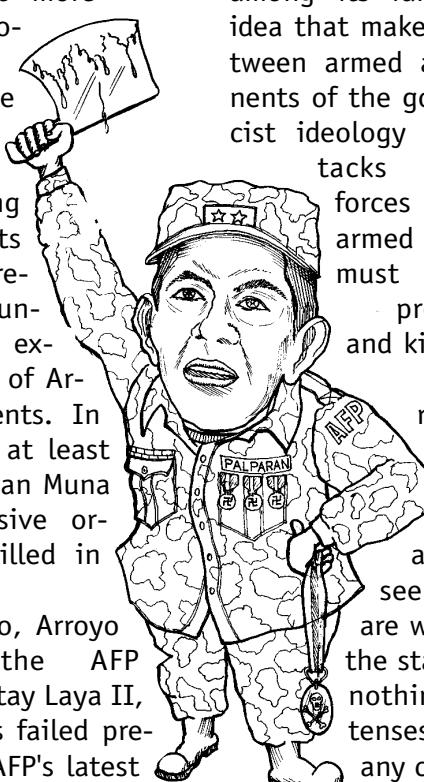
other militant organizations of being communist fronts to discredit the data they presented and worse, make them targets for military attacks. She denounced as lies the data showing that more than 820 cases of political killings have occurred since she assumed power in 2001.

The continuing killings of activists and the political repression in both countryside and cities expose the emptiness of Arroyo's pronouncements. In the past few days, at least ten members of Bayan Muna and other progressive organizations were killed in Bicol and Samar.

A few weeks ago, Arroyo approved and the AFP launched Oplan Bantay Laya II, more brutal than its failed previous version. The AFP's latest internal security operational plan is aimed at the strategic defeat of the revolutionary movement by 2010. It will be marked by more death squad killings of leaders and

members of progressive parties and organizations branded as communist fronts or part of the Communist Party's political infrastructure.

The AFP has been propagating among its ranks the malevolent idea that makes no distinction between armed and unarmed opponents of the government. This fascist ideology justifies armed attacks against unarmed forces who are counted as armed opponents and thus must be ruthlessly suppressed, brutalized and killed.



The victims, their relatives, the democratic organizations and the whole nation have a burning desire to see justice done. They are well aware that since the start, Arroyo has done nothing but make pretenses and lie to evade any criminal responsibility while intensifying abuse and violence against the progressive and militant critics of her regime.

An honest, thorough, fair and just investigation and trial of the cases of political killings and state terrorism can only be possible if it is conducted by a group of independent personalities with a high level of integrity and morality and free from the influence and dictates of Arroyo and her henchmen. It must have the power and capability to subpoena and arrest those accused and sentence those proven guilty.

With the Arroyo regime's continuing intransigence, the victims, their relatives, the democratic forces and the people have only their unity and concerted action to rely on. Local and international

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# Worsening killings in Bicol and Samar

**G**loria Arroyo's butchers are on a killing rampage against members of militant groups as the May 2007 election approaches. Following are some of the incidents documented by *Ang Bayan*:

**February 6.** Armed men ambushed Motiong, Samar Vice Mayor Francisco Langi and his wife Agripita, wounding the couple and killing Jessie Dacanay, the driver of the motorcycle they were riding. Langi is known to be close to progressive groups.

**February 2.** Suspected elements of the RHB bandit group ambushed and killed urban poor organizer Sixto Azilan, 47. Azilan's companion Rey de Luna was wounded in the ambush. Prior to the incident, Azilan had been summoned several times by the 8th ID for interrogation.

**January 29.** Arroyo assassins aboard a motorcycle shot and killed Dominador de Luna, 50, a member of the Confederation for Unity, Advancement and Recognition of Government Employees (Courage) in Samar and an employee of the National Food Authority. His wife, Concepcion de Luna, is a provincial board member and Bayan Muna leader in Samar. De Luna died instantly from gunshot wounds in the head. He is the

825th victim of extrajudicial killings since Arroyo assumed power in January 2001.

**January 27.** An Arroyo death squad shot but failed to kill Flor Acbo, 54, Bagong Alyansang Makabayan-Eastern Visayas information officer. Acbo was able to evade the assassins but Eric de Guzman, 27, a civilian, was hit in the left foot. The shooting occurred at 9 p.m. a few meters from Acbo's home at the Philippine Housing Homestead Corp. (PHHC) in Barangay Nulatula, Tacloban City.

**January 25.** Security guards and elements of big Negros landlord Rodolfo Cuenca's Civilian Volunteer Organization opened fire on 100 farmers trying to occupy the land granted to them by the Department of Agrarian Reform in 2002, killing Pepito Santillan, 60, and wounding Fernando Santillan, 41, Rey Cortejo, 34 and two others.

**January 23.** Assassins aboard motorcycles killed Ruben Ermino, 52, and Demetrio "Don" Imperial, 26, members of Bayan Muna in Sorsogon and Albay. Ermino was killed at noon while driving his tricycle in Barangay Tabi, Gubat, Sorsogon. Imperial was killed at 7 p.m. in his home in Barangay Sogoy, Castilla, Sorsogon. That same day, Miguel Dayandate and Julio Camero, both

members of Bayan Muna who have long been missing were found dead in Ligao, Albay.

**January 22.** Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas-Southern Mindanao secretary-general Amancio Carmelo survived an assassination attempt by a death squad in Tagum City. The assassins fired twice at Carmelo but missed.

**January 21.** Arroyo assassins killed Ananias Burce, chairman of Barangay Oras, Tabaco City, Albay. Burce was killed in Barangay Bantayan, Tabaco City. The military suspected Burce of supporting the NPA. He died from eight gunshot wounds.

**January 17.** Two Philippine Air Force MG-520 attack helicopters bombed and strafed Sitio Soob, Barangay Poblacion, Albuera, Leyte. Many civilians had to flee their homes due to the intense bombing and strafing.

That same day, more than 200 elements of the PNP Regional Mobile Group in full battle gear assaulted the provincial capitol in Iloilo City to forcibly evict Gov. Niel Tupas. Five Western Visayas governors and a mayor condemned the excessive use of force and the ruthless assault. Tupas is an official of the anti-Arroyo faction of the Liberal Party headed by Sen. Franklin Drilon. AB

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campaigns must be launched to expose and vigorously oppose the fascist Arroyo regime's systematic killing of legal activists and the many more unarmed and innocent civilians.

We must expose the regime's blood lust and utterly fascist character and condemn Arroyo and her murderous minions for their crimes against the people. The campaign against the ruthless killings and all-out

repression is an adjunct of the people's struggle to overthrow the much despised regime.

Arroyo and her fascist co-conspirators must pay for every life they have taken in their brutal antipeople war. The victims and the people have issued a resounding cry for justice and the punishment of the masterminds and operatives responsible for the relentless political killings. This can best be achieved now that the brutal Arroyo regime is much hated, extremely isolated and fast losing political power. AB

# US military intervention in the Philippines

The US government and the Arroyo regime have been conducting an extensive propaganda campaign to justify US military intervention in the Philippines. Over the past few weeks, they have relentlessly been harping that US support and leadership are key factors in their operations against so-called terrorists. The AFP has been bragging about its joint efforts with the US military in killing Abu Sayyaf leaders Kadaffi Janjalani and Jaina Antel Sali (Abu Solaiman, according to the AFP). The Abu Sayyaf is a small local bandit group in Basilan and Sulu that the military tags as terrorist.

While profusely thanking the US for its "leadership and support," the Arroyo regime has made every effort to conceal the actual extent of American military involvement in operations against the Abu Sayyaf. The Arroyo regime strives to escalate US military intervention, but fears igniting stronger and broader patriotic sentiments among the Filipino people. The regime also wants to avoid criminal liability for violating a constitutional provision prohibiting the involvement of foreign troops in combat operations in the Philippines. While admitting that American troops conduct strike operations in the Philippines, the Arroyo regime's officials and the AFP insist that American involvement is limited to providing intelligence, equipment, advice and training.

All these in fact constitute US military intervention in the Philippines. Air reconnaissance, espionage and intelligence-gathering using American troops or their agents spread throughout the country are violations of Philippine

sovereignty. US espionage activities, especially for the purpose of gathering tactical combat intelligence are an essential aspect of military operations and are in fact used by the US military to direct AFP combat operations. Even more damning is the actual participation of American troops in combat and special operations that US and Philippine government and military officials continue to conceal.

US military involvement in the fight against the Abu Sayyaf is both stepping stone and preparation for its larger goal of intervening in the counterrevolutionary war and suppressing the patriotic and anti-imperialist movement in the Philippines. The anti-imperialist forces—those who resolutely struggle against the US and its puppet regime's domination and oppression of the country—are the real strategic target of US military intervention in the Philippines. They are primarily composed of the revolutionary armed forces and the legal patriotic and progressive forces.

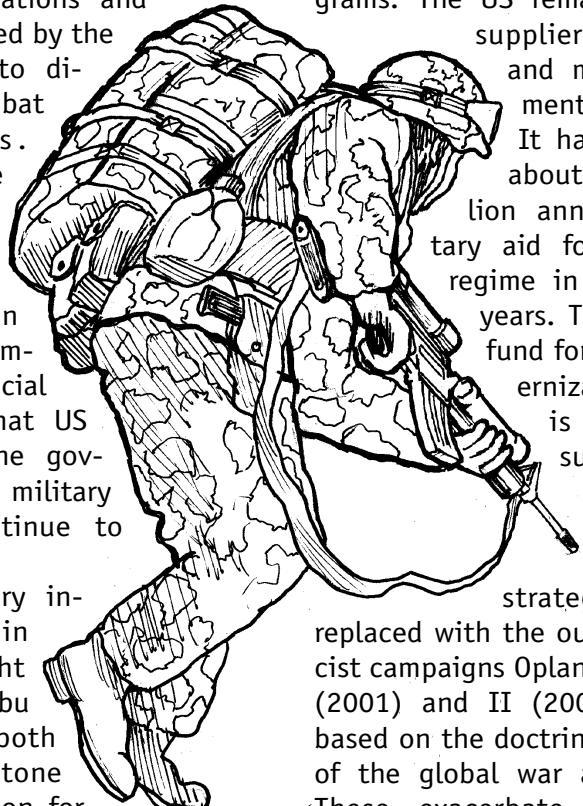
There is a long history of covert and overt US military involvement in the counterrevolutionary war in the Philippines. The Joint US Military Advisory Group (JUSMAG) has long been conducting various training programs for Philippine

military officers and men, and US military advisors have for a long time been drafting and directing the AFP's counter-insurgency programs. The US remains the main supplier of weapons and military equipment for the AFP. It has been giving about \$20-30 million annually in military aid for the puppet regime in the past few years. The ₱10 billion fund for the AFP Modernization Program is drawn from such aid.

The old low-intensity conflict strategy has been replaced with the out-and-out fascist campaigns Oplan Bantay Laya I (2001) and II (2006) which are based on the doctrine and strategy of the global war against terror. These exacerbate the ruthless trampling by the US and its puppet armed forces of civil rights, sovereignty and the laws of war.

The Arroyo regime's campaign of political killings is patterned after the Phoenix Program conducted during the US war of aggression in Vietnam. Tens of thousands of ordinary citizens suspected of aiding the Vietnamese guerrillas were killed yearly in a massive assassination campaign conducted by the US and its puppet regime's troops.

Over the past few years, American troops have been freely entering the revolutionary movement's territories. Since 2004, the US has been taking advantage of natural calamities to deploy its troops in areas it suspects are strongholds of the revolutionary movement. American troops have entered revolu-

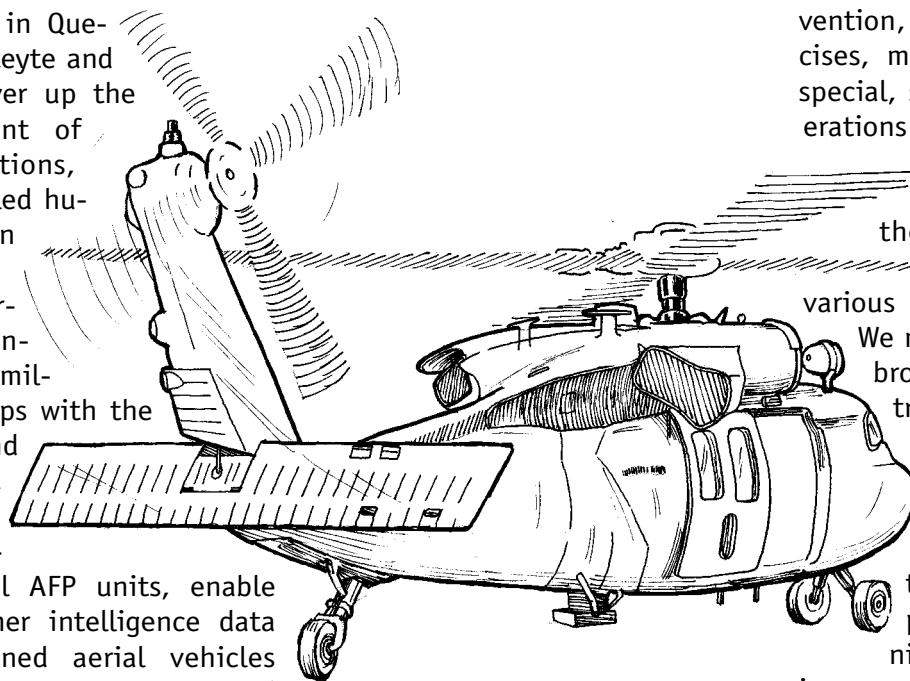


tionary areas in Quezon, Aurora, Leyte and Albay. To cover up the military intent of these operations, they were called humanitarian missions.

These operations are intended to familiarize US troops with the physical and social terrain, enhance their interoperability with local AFP units, enable them to gather intelligence data using unmanned aerial vehicles and spies, recruit mercenaries and assets, prepare the infrastructure for war and project a humanitarian image.

It is the Arroyo regime's unabashed puppetry that has exacerbated US military intervention in the Philippines. It is despicable how Arroyo gushed with delight after US President George W. Bush called to praise her for her "victories" in the "fight against terrorism".

The regime allows American troops and military advisors permanent presence in Philippine camps,



gives free access to US warships and spy planes and allows the involvement of American troops in combat operations—all of which violate national sovereignty and the constitution.

The Arroyo regime has proven itself a true and trustworthy puppet of US imperialism. Desperate for US support, Arroyo has done everything to please her master.

The revolutionary forces and the rest of the Filipino people must do their utmost to expose and resist all forms of US military inter-

vention, from joint military exercises, military advisory activities, special, strike and intelligence operations and other covert forms of participation in military operations, to even their phony humanitarian

missions in various parts of the Philippines.

We must persistently build the broadest united front of patriotic forces to resist deepening US military intervention in the Philippines and thwart other moves that may worsen the problem, including the puppet regime's connivance with US imperialism.

All revolutionary forces must prepare for the gradually intensifying levels of direct military intervention in the revolutionary movement's areas of operation. The moment the US launches a war of aggression against the Philippine revolutionary movement, the revolutionary forces will transform the current civil war into a large-scale national war against US aggression, with the US confronting fierce resistance from the revolutionary forces and patriotic Filipinos.

AB

### *Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines*

## **Longterm presence and military intervention**

**A** US Special Operations unit landed in Zamboanga City in 2002 to launch what was then called Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)-Philippines. OEF-Philippines formed part of US Pres. George W. Bush's imperialist "war against terrorism" after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The launching of OEF-Philippines closely coincided with the US' wars of aggression and its occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq and countries in Africa.

The unit was introduced as the Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines (JSOTF-P). It is under the Special Operations Command-Pacific (SOCOPAC)

which also has units in Japan, Guam, Northern Marianas, Hawaii and Korea. Its avowed primary target is the Abu Sayyaf whom the US has included in its list of foreign terrorist organizations despite its being a mere criminal bandit group. The anti-Abu Sayyaf operations are being used as a stepping stone for longer-term US military intervention against a strategic target—the revolutionary forces spread throughout the majority of the country's provinces.

The JSOTF-P is based at the AFP Edwin Andrews Air Base in Zamboanga City and conducts special military operations around the city and the nearby islands of

Basilan and Sulu. It intentionally enters and occupies known Abu Sayyaf areas to provoke the bandit group to attack and engage it in combat.

The JSOTF-P forces are unlike the regular US troops who join Balikatan military exercises with Filipino soldiers. Troops involved in Balikatan stay in the country for a few weeks, while JSOTF-P forces have been embedded with Filipino troops since 2002. The US and the Arroyo regime publicize the number of participants, venue, activities and the duration of Balikatan exercises, but conceal details about JSOTF-P operations.

At first, the US and the Arroyo regime announced that JSOTF-P operations were primarily civic in nature. The Special Operations troops quietly entered the country in 2002, with the US deviously including them in Operation Smile, one of the largest medical missions involving the US Armed Forces and various "charitable" organizations. Operation Smile was brought in, in between two largescale Balikatan exercises to make it look as if the



Special Operations troops were among the Americans participating in Balikatan.

Operation Smile ended in July 2002, but the JSOTF-P stayed be-

hind in areas covered by the medical mission. They camouflage their continued stay with civic programs like building schools and clinics, deep wells and outhouses and conducting educational and health campaigns, among others. They receive occasional visits from the US ambassador, military officers and other US military forces with so-called humanitarian missions (such as the USS Mercy) to emphasize this aspect of their presence and conceal the intervention of US troops in AFP military operations in Mindanao.

The US SOF uses civic programs to breach Moro communities which are largely hostile to the presence of both Filipino and American troops. Simultaneously, US Special Operations Forces launch psywar campaigns to deceive and win over the residents and induce them into accepting the longterm presence of American troops. Most of the communities oppose American military

## Main types of US SOF operations

The US SOF manual specifies two main roles and types of operations conducted by special operations forces: foreign internal defense (FID) and unconventional warfare. These comprise the two prongs of military intervention engaged in by the SOF.

Under FID, US special operations forces embed themselves in, train, coordinate with and assist the military forces of other governments (like the Philippines) in campaigns against crime, terrorism and "insurgency." In the case of the JSOTF-P, US forces not only join AFP operations but fund, plan and direct them. This is in addition to conducting their own covert special operations.

Unconventional warfare, on the other hand, involves civil-military operations, overt intelligence operations, covert special operations, "strike operations" and combat operations—with the latter being mentioned in their manual but never publicly admitted.

Past JSOTF-P commanders have acknowledged that their unit's main mission in the Philippines is to wage unconventional warfare against "terrorism" and "insurgency." US SOF documents do not differentiate between combat and non-combat operations. AB

presence, not because they support the Abu Sayyaf, but because they have experienced intense bombing, human rights violations and the largescale destruction of their livelihood brought about by incessant and brutal AFP attacks in the past.

Through such subterfuge, the US SOF can freely pursue their operations in Mindanao. Besides intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance operations, they also launch covert special military operations independently or with the AFP.

The JSOTF-P's avowed orientation is to serve as the command center for Balikatan. Its documents and reports clearly state that it may use training exercises as a smokescreen for its military operations. Wherever they maintain their presence, US special forces are deeply involved in AFP military operations, including combat operations.

While the Philippine government officially denies the involvement of American forces in local combat operations, AFP Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Hermogenes Esperon has time and again admitted that American troops play a part in special strike operations. The largest ambush and strike operation against the Abu Sayyaf since 2002 was jointly implemented by Filipino and American troops led by the JSOTF-P.

A case in point is the participation of US S/Sgt Reggie Lane in a raid by the Philippine Army 18th IB on the house of the Isnijal family in Barangay Canas, Tuburan, Basilan in June 2002. An unarmed civilian, Buyong Buyong Isnijal, was shot in the thigh and



## US resumes Balikatan exercises

The US is set to resume the stalled Balikatan military exercises on February 18 after Lance Corporal Daniel Smith, an American soldier convicted of raping Filipina "Nicole" in November 2005 was surreptitiously transferred to the US Embassy's custody. The US had cancelled the military exercises last December 22 to protest Judge Benjamin Pozon's denial of Smith's petition to have himself transferred to US custody after his sentencing.

"Nicole's" supporters have roundly condemned Smith's transfer to US custody without a court order. Smith's transfer was effected after a secret agreement between Gloria Arroyo and US ambassador Kristie Kenney which Arroyo entered into in violation of all established legal procedures. Critics charge Arroyo of agreeing to the transfer to please her imperialist master and pave the way for the resumption of the Balikatan military exercises. AB

forcibly taken by the raiding party on suspicion that he was Abu Sayyaf. Isnijal's relatives and friends deny he is an Abu Sayyaf member.

Despite the large number of US SOF deployed in Afghanistan and Iraq (especially in the latter where there are 10,000 US SOF—the largest since the Vietnam War), their operations are largely failures because of the utter lack of peoples' support and the breadth and intensity of rebel Afghani and Iraqi resistance.

In the Philippines, they have failed to defeat the small bandit group Abu Sayyaf for the past five years. All the US and the Arroyo regime could do is brag about their recent killing of several Abu Sayyaf leaders. They make it seem as if the presence of American forces in the Philippines and the programs they have implemented have yielded positive results and that the SOF have brought prosperity and peace to Basilan. They claim that their so-called "Basilan model" would serve

as the prototype of their operations worldwide.

This bluster is a thin cloak concealing the difficulties brought about by their presence and operations in Basilan. Their civic programs cannot cover up the brutal raids and attacks by joint American and Filipino forces against people suspected of aiding the Abu Sayyaf. Illegal arrests and detention, intimidation, house searches, zoning and other human rights violations are widespread. There are cases of killings and abductions, indiscriminate firing of weapons and other activities that terrorize the populace.

The US is clearly invoking the Abu Sayyaf as a pretext for undertaking deeper and more extensive military intervention. Drawing forces from the huge numbers of soldiers entering the country for the Balikatan, the JSOTF-P has been able to regularly expand its operations in Mindanao and in areas in Luzon and the Visayas where the revolutionary movement and the NPA have notable strength.

These incursions into NPA guerrilla fronts are preparatory steps towards eventually intervening in AFP military operations against the revolutionary forces. AB



## NPA military actions in Sorsogon and Cagayan

A SOLDIER was killed last January 25 in an NPA attack on elements of the 42nd IB encamped at the village hall in Barangay Bonga, Castilla, Sorsogon.

Meanwhile two 17th IB troopers were wounded in an encounter with NPA guerrillas in Barangay Caruppian, Baggao, Cagayan last January 21.

A trooper was killed and four others were wounded last January 20 in two separate firefights between the NPA and military troops on operation in Barangays Lungib and Palanas in Pilar, Sorsogon.

## NPA punishes fascist mayor

ELEMENTS of the NPA-Arnulfo Ortiz Command in Samar province punished Daram Mayor Benito Astorga around 2 a.m. of January 25 in Barangay Birawan. Astorga was attending a dance when he was punished by the NPA.

In a statement, the NPA-Arnulfo Ortiz Command said Astorga was responsible for numerous crimes against the revolutionary movement and the people in the long time that he was mayor. He was involved in the killing of comrades operating in the area in 2003 and civilians suspected of supporting the NPA. He built a Barangay Information Network and maintained a 180-man CAFGU to support the counterrevolutionary military campaign. He also banned non-governmental organizations and other progressive groups from entering his town.

In a related incident, the NPA punished Augusto Daclitan, 53, in the evening of January 24 in front of the Samar provincial capitol. Daclitan surrendered to former 8th ID Commander Maj. Gen. Jovito Palparan, Jr. and has figured extensively in the counterrevolutionary campaign in Samar as provincial coordinator of the anti-communist group Alliance for Nationalism and Democracy (ANAD).

In Albay, NPA guerrillas punished Jose Loreno, 56, around 7 p.m. of January 25 in his house in Barangay Maroroy, Daraga. Loreno was an active leader of the Kilusang Kontra-Komunista in the area.

## AFP intensifies campaign against Bayan Muna

THE AFP is intensifying its campaign of terror and intimidation against members and supporters of Bayan Muna and other progressive parties as the May election approaches.

In Cabuyao, Laguna this month, the AFP convened a mass meeting in Southville National Relocation Site two days after a Bayan Muna meeting in the area. The AFP showed the PowerPoint presentation "Knowing the Enemy" that identified as communist fronts and "enemies of the state" Bayan Muna and other progressive organizations. They warned the people against supporting Bayan Muna and threatened to arrest all its members and supporters in the community. Cabuyao is just one of many areas supporting Bayan Muna targeted by the AFP in its slander and intimidation campaign. Progressive parties are closely monitoring the campaign being conducted by various AFP units in the provinces and within Metro Manila.

## Congress denies paltry wage hike

CONGRESS withdrew a bill last January 22 calling for an across-the-board ₱125 daily wage increase for workers. Cavite Rep. Jesus Crispin Remulla, a Malacañang toady, sponsored a motion to change the proposed law's effectiveness from October 2006 to January 2007. Remulla's motion is the first step to the bill's eventual withdrawal. The Arroyo regime has long been against any increase in workers' wages despite the stark reality of an economic crisis and the Filipino people's abject poverty. Progressive party representatives condemned the withdrawal, slamming the fact the regime had the gall to deprive the workers of even such a minuscule wage increase. Workers have been demanding a wage hike for the past six years.